

The History of Lingerie

When you got dressed this morning you probably didn't even think about the simple ritual of covering our bodies that we go through every day. Slipping into something sexy, pretty and comfy to go underneath our clothes has become the norm for most women on a daily basis. Historically, lingerie has always had its practical purposes. Because of the very nature of underclothing, however, it being the innermost garment that intimately covers the naked body as well as being the last tactile piece of fabric that is touched before skin touches skin, there will always be a very sexual connection with our intimate apparel and that goes back for centuries.

Ancient Lingerie

Although not much is known about ancient people and their undergarments, certainly it was like any other time in history in that the clothing worn depended largely on one's social stature. Wealthy or affluent people had greater means to attend to fashion and comfort, where the average person was more likely to wear what was practical

and readily available. In Ancient Egypt, women of means would wear linen tunic shaped garments that fitted below the breasts and were held on by a strap that went over the shoulders. Sometimes these tunics were cinched in at the waist in order to form a bit of a waistline.

In Ancient Rome, there is evidence found in the artwork of this era that perhaps a wrapped form of a brief or bikini-like garment may have been worn by women, most likely for practical reasons. Garments known as mammillary and fascia, which were basically bands of tight fabric, were worn around the breasts for supportive reasons. These pieces of clothing were hardly sexy as we would consider it today, but they were sometimes worn as outer clothing as well, probably mostly for functional reasons.

In these ancient days, the exposure of the female breasts was likely not considered as scandalous or risqué as it would be today. Bodices that pushed the breasts up and out were part of everyday fashion and full bosom exposure was commonplace. These styles can undoubtedly be considered to be some of the very earliest examples of rudimentary intimate apparel that would accentuate and enhance the female form, likely having a very obvious effect on the men at large during the time period. Using fashion and dress to tease and attract men is hardly a new

idea; women have obviously been doing this for centuries.

Middle Ages

During the middle Ages, the fashion ideal of the female form changed somewhat and the desired look became far more constrained and sometimes included flattened breasts and very cinched in waistlines. Women would use corsets and other lingerie implements to achieve the look of a ridiculously flat stomach, very narrow waistline and a rigidly flat chest. A linen chemise-like garment was worn underneath clothes, largely for practical purposes and was likely the only garment that would be washed with any frequency. This undergarment would help keep the outer clothing clean and protect the more expensive outer clothing from dirty bodies and provide an extra layer of warmth. This light layer was worn as a layer underneath the tight corsets as well.

Many torture devices were invented and used during this early time period, but none so commonly used as the corset! Although not technically designed in order to torture, it's hard to imagine anything as uncomfortable for a woman to wear as this laced up garment, designed and used as it was in these early days. These early corsets were laced in

the back and it usually took another person (not to mention a great deal of strength) to lace them extremely tightly in order to cinch in the waistline to its desired tininess. As ridiculous as it may seem, women were known to swoon and faint frequently from having a corset that was laced extremely tight. At the time these fainting spells were often attributed to the females supposed frail and delicate nature, which was hardly actually the case. Having ribs, organs and body parts completely squished to the point of near bodily damage likely caused the fainting spells. In spite of its uncomfortable nature, the corset was a woman's go-to primary lingerie piece for well over 350 years.

By the 1500's, corset use was a mainstay in the female's lingerie wardrobe and would be in various levels of tightness and structure for many years to come. Catherine de Medici is rumored to have had strict standards for her ladies in waiting as she herself frowned upon anyone with a thick waist. A corset made of metal known as the "iron corset" may have been worn by women during this time period, although it is likely that a corset of this heavy structured nature would have been extremely uncomfortable and would have made any activity of substance very unlikely. This garment is indicative of some of the extremes that women throughout the ages have gone to in order to attain the level of fashion, appearance or sexiness that they considered to be desirable.

The French Revolution

Oooh la la and hallelujah to the French! During the French Revolutionary period around 1789, a brief, but welcome, respite was brought to women when it came to their underwear. Women shunned the stiff corset and rebelled against all symbols of the aristocracy, including their all too conforming underwear. Empire waist dresses that became en vogue during this time period didn't require the cinched in tight waistlines anymore, and for a brief time period in history--women could breathe again. Breasts became the focus, however and whatever light 'un-corset' was worn underneath gowns and dresses was designed once again, to push the breasts up and out!

As time rolled on, it wasn't long before styles changed and waistlines moved back down to a more natural level--thus requiring resurgence in that most annoying female lingerie device, the [sexy corset](#). By 1825, waistlines were being cinched in again and the traditional hourglass figure was the desired shape coveted by women everywhere. Advances made in the design and production of corsets, including the use of metal eyelets, ensured that women could be tightly laced into them without

tearing or ripping the corset itself. The suffering caused by the use of the corset had returned in all its glory- and this undergarment's use would be considered the norm under women's fashion throughout the 19th century. This century also first introduced the use of stockings, which were likely the predecessors to thigh high hosiery. Garters were attached to corsets and were used to hold up these stockings. The Victorian Age, although considered to be one of the most prim and proper in history, is ironically the age where some of the most classically sexy lingerie pieces have their roots. Corsets, garter belts, stockings--all designed to create and enhance an hourglass figure were commonly used during this somewhat sexually repressed time period. Embroidery, laces and bows were added to the undergarments to make them more decorative as well as beautiful. Believe it or not, some of the first strip tease shows began late during this time period. French Can Can dancers created a ruckus when they would show glimpses of their petticoats, garters and stockings during their high-kicking dance numbers.

By the beginning of the 20th century, women were becoming more active and participated in many more outdoor activities. This activity and lifestyle required much less restrictive underwear. Mary Phelps Jacob invented the first bra in 1913, supposedly made by tying 2 handkerchiefs together. Mary began making her bras for family and friends and by 1914

had patented her design and was marketing her bras throughout the United States. During this time period the corset was ditched, and bloomers were being worn, getting shorter and shorter as well because women were getting more involved in athletics and other active pursuits.

The Flapper Era and Beyond

By the 1920's the desired silhouette of a woman's body dictated by fashion became dramatically different than it had ever been before. Women were striving for a freer, more streamlined, very straight, almost boyish figure. Cami-knickers became a very popular lingerie item during this time period, which are essentially a camisole with a longer knickers all sewn into one piece. These cami-knickers were the perfect wardrobe essential to go under the straight, tubular dresses of the 20's that were designed to de-emphasize the bust line while at the same time having a shockingly shorter hemline compared to the floor length dresses that were the norm twenty years prior.

The fifties brought the female hourglass figure back with a big bang. The bra had solidified itself in every woman's wardrobe and its shape had

become quite extreme and quite pointed. The sweater girls of this era, such as Lana Turner and Jane Mansfield made the look of nearly conical breasts, small waists and full hips the desired and coveted look of the day. Panty girdles with garters helped women to cinch in their waistlines and to keep their hosiery in place. Thigh high stockings were very popular and definitely were designed to be both functional as well as sexy. These garter belts are the definite forerunners to the contemporary as well as very sexy lingerie styles that stem from this look today.

The 1960's brought in with it an era devoted to freedom and non-conformity. Talk of bra-burning and women's liberation became the war cry of the day. Women's lingerie followed suit and bras became less structured, softer and often were wireless. Decorative tights took the place of thigh high stockings and garter belts as this type of hosiery was the perfect accompaniment to the mini skirts that were popularized during this decade. The woman's body was finally fully celebrated for it's (mostly) natural shape.

1980's and 1990's--Technology hits Lingerie

Cleavage became popular again in the 1980's and women who weren't lucky enough to be self-endowed, realized quickly that what nature didn't do--bra technology could. The advent of the Wonderbra and other push up bras would comfortably give women what they wanted--deliciously full cleavage. Plunging necklines that were popular during these decades became very alluring with the ample cleavage and pumped up bosom line created by these fabulous bras. Padded and underwire bras became extremely popular, a trend which continues to this day.

Lingerie for the Modern Woman

Well, it took us a long time to get here--and in the process, women have been molded, squished, conformed, flattened, pumped up and pushed out--but today's woman at last has what she really wants. EVERYTHING! Today's lingerie is made to be comfortable, sexy, figure enhancing as well as flattering. No matter what your lingerie goals or needs may be, there is a vast array of products in today's lingerie marketplace that are designed to meet intimate apparel wardrobe needs. Bras come in every imaginable fabrication as well as style and include gel filled, air filled,

padded, strapless, backless, as well as convertible and many more. Panties cover a wide range from shapers and granny panties to g-strings and thongs. Other lingerie items are readily available including babydolls, teddies, chemises and gowns--if you can dream of it, you can probably wear it. Today's woman is lucky because she has more lingerie choices available to her than at any other time in history. The next time you get dressed in the morning you can think about all that it took to get to where we are just so you could slip on that bra and panty. Lingerie has taken a long journey, something to think about as you go out and make some history of your own!

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